



FIVE POEMS

BY

DAVID BLUMENFELD

WHY I LIKE THEM: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes...*

David Blumenfeld writes in various voices on a variety of subjects. In 'in the land with no future' the tone is dire. The absence of punctuation recommends a sense of alarm, while without uppercase letters, it seems a whispered warning--as the lines lengthen with a heightening urgency, "no relief no surcease." 'The Fish' differs dramatically. The creative spacing, like a cast line, is playful, his alliterations hook us as he takes his time, slowly and smoothly, reeling us in with the flex of his pen. As for 'My Soul,' Blumenfeld breaks into more traditional verse, rhyming no less, as he waxes romantic, wanes sardonic--"a eunuch pacing around the room / who longs to be a blushing groom"--and fades to universal truths. 'Berkeley: 1963 - 1965' is a gripping reminiscence in free verse. And, 'A Little Too Cynical?' is engagingly written and reads like a childrens' book the contents of which you could only find in the Adult Section--no need to picture it, read on...

in the land with no future

dark clouds hover

cover the sun blocking light

stifling air bilious black smog soot

choking life below polluted skies no rain

no relief trapped heat parching everything rivers

drying hovering rain-bombs submerging entire counties

killing thousands rising seas omnivorously devouring islands

displacing homeless hoards oil-drenched beaches covered in marine

corpses factories cars still belching carbon poisoning oceans dying ruined

reefs dead coral ensnared whales fish dying of plastic diet flaming forests millions

of migrants moving the poor displaced starving even the rich running no relief no surcease

in land with no future

could it be here

could it be soon

could it be

now

The Fish

The bobber didn't bob

it

dove

darted

deep

out of sight

in a

single

solitary

second

as if a whale witlessly wandering unwarily into this wayward water hitting hard

dipped

so deep

submerged

so fast

sank

so far

the boy fairly failed to yank in time but when, woke, he did, the furious fight was on, the line

taut as a knotted nerve stretched slim, close to snapping, cane straining, almost cracking,

careening, cavorting, caroming

THIS WAY...

TAHT DNA ← ← ←

his muscles tight, taut, tussling, tugging too, fearful, fretting the lurching line might

snag,

slit,

go slack

and slithering

sink

↓

↓

↓

light, limp and listless, floating freely on the fetid foam

but NO ...

the fish, hooked hard, bounding for a boulder bank, blithely banishes the bobber and, scrappily

scraping those rugged rocks, almost severs the slim string now a thin thread, the boy

perched precipitously on the pier perspiring prodigiously ponders the plot and produces a

(possibly) propitious plan:

as the lunging Leviathan on labored line lists left to swipe-snap-snip-sever-scissure-and-slice it,

the adolescent angler

UP

UP

stands steadily, arms upright cane hoisted
bow but not burst ---

high, helping the hapless tip bend and

“Heaven help me if you can” he hollers

and he-manly heaves with heft and heart, as cars roar by on the bustling bridge above not
noticing for the nonce his brutal battle, oblivious to the war waged way, way

↓

↓

↓

below and holding hard he manages a maneuver mightily moving the monster from the rugged
rocks, shiftily shuttles the sizeable sucker (for that is what it is) toward the pier and the net
nearby his faltering feet,

VICTORY now at hand he hesitates and Lo! the fatigued fish in a final flash, a strenuous
swerve, suddenly streaks → → → → → → → →

for the pier’s perilous pilings in one last lurch to break the tortured, twisted twine that tethers him
to the tired boy

BUT

holding fast (both line and boy) the fearsome fish falters, fades and failing fast, still fettered,

My Soul

To W.W.

“You can’t write poems about your soul anymore. It’s *out*.”

“Oh yeah? Who says so?”

anonymous

My soul's a seedling in the ground

a purple daisy twirling around

a swelling, singing, bursting dam

a sweet and sugary pot of jam

a happy lark who flies away

a mating donkey about to bray

a giggling girl who's having fun

a warm and fragrant hot cross bun

a train that's humming on the tracks

a bowl of crunchy crackerjacks

a diamond fallen from above

a happy hand, a dancing glove.

My soul's a scorched black piece of toast

a braggart with a baseless boast

a glass of milk that's just gone stale

a falling fighter turning pale

a simple fool whose tongue's cut out

who moves his mouth but cannot shout

a eunuch pacing around the room

who longs to be a blushing groom

a stunted back that will not grow

a violin without a bow

a hunter trapped without his gun

a man who's lost his only son.

I sing of my soul's burgeoning tensions

its joys, its fears, its deep apprehensions

its traumas and triumphs and proud exultations

its griefs, its glories, its searing damnations.

Do I contradict myself? asked the American seer

who saw above all that there's nothing to fear

in a soul that contains multitudes
ecstasies, anxieties, boundless infinitudes.

So, sing of your soul and all that it holds
the heartache and bliss that it somehow enfolds
sing of your Self, and you'll sing of Me too
you'll sing of us all: we're One through and through.

Berkeley: 1963 - 1965

Staring up into those incomparably beautiful hills
through pellucid, still unpolluted skies,
I'm sure I've gone to heaven,
studying philosophy...Kant, Hume, Wittgenstein...
all the great thinkers, past and present;
strolling down Telegraph Avenue
in cut-off shorts, shades and leather sandals,
doing the twist to Chubby Checker in the evening,

dancing to the Stones, the Beatles, Aretha,
“Godfather” James Brown, Dylan, Baez
while “What’d I Say,” blasts loudly, endlessly
on fraternity row --- “Oh, Oh, Oh...Unh! Unh! Unh!” ---
in an ultra-hip call and response, watching avant-garde flicks
at the Cinema-Guild and Studio with windy high-brow analysis to follow,
late-night trips over the Bay Bridge to the Haight-Ashbury and Chinatown
long after sipping coffee at Café Mediterranean
in the gentle Berkeley sun with poets, self-absorbed sages, gurus,
left-over beatniks, hippies, flower children, potheads,
mushroom-eaters who’ve tuned in, turned on and dropped out
years before Timothy Leary will advise them to,
high on psilocybin, hash, grass and LSD,
eager to see God the easy way, sitting side-by-side
with scholars and scientists chattering in their own lingo
intelligible only to the cognoscenti, shoulder-to-shoulder with
passionate revolutionaries: socialists, communists, hordes of
naïve, rosy-cheeked, life-hungry, ideology-free, knowledge-seeking kids

protesting (protesting what? “What have you got?”),
still reeling from the news of our slain young president,
unaware of how much more is yet to come,
seeking justice: civil rights, free speech,
following Mario, supreme orator, with his unforgettable,
fervid, half-stammering voice, raised high on the Sproul Hall steps
against a recalcitrant, calcified administration
and we, like him, sick at heart,
ready to put our bodies upon the gears and wheels and levers,
on all the apparatus, to make it stop,
so ready we surround a police car carrying Jack Weinberg, a leader,
as hundreds of us keep it from moving until they relent
and we sit in by the score in Sproul to press our point...
“I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness,”
Ginsberg howls to us and Mailer hands out buttons with LBJ’s photo upside down
to shake out all the peckers Lyndon brags he has in his pocket
and make him end the terrible war in Vietnam so we can end *all* wars,
and ban the bomb...*forever*...and clean up our oceans and rivers and...

“We shall overcome.

We shall overcome,”

we shout as we march to create a better world

and we *will* create a better world

with compassion and LOVE

“Make love, not war!

Make love, not War,”

and with sex, lots of

sex, drugs and rock and roll.

A Little Too Cynical?

God save us all from the misery of life

The sickness and pain, the sorrow and strife

The horrible heartache of unrequited love

Unanswered prayers directed above

Poverty, destitution, and endless despair

Long lonely years with no one to care

Bunions and boils and slimy thick scabs

Herpes and syphilis, gonorrhea and crabs

That blight you and bite you in places that hurt
Leaving bloody blue spots and excrement dirt
Neuroses, depressions and endless obsessions
Anxiety and conflict, perpetual transgressions

Miserable migraines that mercilessly afflict you
saddling you with pills that eventually addict you
Yet just when you think you've conquered it all
You trip on the stairs and have a bad fall

Bringing weeks in the hospital, boring and endless
And when you get out, you find that you're friendless
Alone in your hut, a horrible hovel
Then off to your job where you kiss ass and grovel

Doing menial tasks and meaningless chores ---
You'd spend better time with robbers and whores
But don't dare complain or you'll surely be fired
Tossed out in the street and never rehired

So be the boss's toady and dance to his tune
Jump when he says jump, like a foolish buffoon
Surrender yourself without care, without fear

Bend over obediently and take it in the rear

If somehow you manage to endure all of this

And finally find love --- an embrace and a kiss ---

Don't be a dolt and think you'll be happy

It won't take very long for things to turn crappy

The lovely young thing who swore to be true

In under a month will turn into a shrew

A harpy, a harridan, a hellcat, a biddy

Who makes every day rotten and shitty

She'll sleep with your friends and enemies too

There's no one in town that she will not screw

She'll spend all your money, you poor hopeless bloke

Leaving you in the poorhouse destitute and broke

If, seeking some solace, support, and relief

You turn to religion to escape from your grief

And hopefully consult with your church's finest prelate

You'll find that the bastard's a miserable zealot

Whose threadbare advice is nothing but platitude:

“Have faith,” he will say, “and work on your attitude”

At the end of it all, when you hear your death knell

He’ll happily inform you that you’re going to hell!

This is the essence of my philosophy of existence

I’ll admit only this much if it meets with resistance:

My friends have remarked that I tend to be skeptical

that my perspective on things is somewhat dyspeptical

That I treat all of life as something to bludgeon

And occasionally come off as a cranky curmudgeon

So if my views seem pernicious, morose, and inimical

I’ll concede that they might be *just a little too cynical*.

THE POET SPEAKS: *When I was in graduate school in philosophy in Berkeley in my twenties back in the 1960s, recovering from a divorce and the fact that my young son now lived with his mother 2500 miles away, I wrote down a bedtime story I had told my son on a visit he made to see me. This led to my writing children’s literature as a way of coping with the depression his absence caused. Eventually I stopped when I found I didn’t have time or energy to do that plus the brain-busting work of philosophy. Fifty years later, in retirement, I took it up again along with writing “grown-up” stories and poetry ---- this time as a way of coping with the loss of a brother, a father, a mother, and a wife of almost thirty-years. All of us have divergent paths our*

lives might have taken and, in my case, it has been a stroke of great good fortune to have been able to return to a path I once started but never finished. Ironically, too, what began as a way of coping with depression or grief has ultimately become a source of considerable joy.

AUTHOR BIO: David Blumenfeld (aka Dean Flowerfield) is an emeritus philosophy professor and associate dean who in retirement returned to writing poetry, creative nonfiction, and children's literature, which he abandoned in his early thirties to devote full-time to philosophy. One of his recent pieces was cited in Best American Essays, 2022 as a "notable essay;" another received a Pushcart Prize nomination; a third was "highly commended" in the 2022 Autumn Voices international poetry competition and has just been republished in Five Points. His work for children has appeared in The Caterpillar, Balloons Lit. Journal, Smarty Pants, Carmina, The Dirigible Balloon, and various anthologies. Davidcblumenfeld.com